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Evaluation

Evaluation of the regional cooperation framework for Asia and the Pacific, 2002-2006*

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I Background

1. The present report provides a summary of the findings of the independent evaluation of the second regional cooperation framework (RCF) for Asia and the Pacific, 2002-2006, which the Evaluation Office submits to the Executive Board. That evaluation was carried out between December 2006 and March 2007. The second RCF was originally approved for the period 2002-2006 but was extended to 2007 so that it could be harmonized with the cycle of the multi-year funding framework, 2004-2007.

2. The evaluation was designed to assess the overall programme performance and outcomes of the second RCF in Asia and the Pacific, covering its scope and range, policy advisory services, knowledge sharing and networking, and capacity development activities. The findings are intended to provide inputs to the design of the next RCF for the region. The evaluation was carried out in parallel with similar evaluations of the RCF programmes in other regions, namely, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. The evaluation of the second RCF in Asia and the Pacific is the one which most significantly builds on previous outcome evaluations and uses a meta-evaluation methodology. This has been possible because the three outcome evaluations – on the poverty, governance and HIV/AIDS clusters of projects – are of reasonably good quality and cover a fair part of the programme. Combined, the outcome evaluations, which focus on projects that have been completed, cover about half of the projects under the RCF (14 out of 30 projects). However, there has been no outcome evaluation dealing with the area 'fostering sub-regional cooperation'.

4. As part of the methodology, an evaluation framework was developed. The questions raised are grouped under the customary evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Impact could have been added to the list, but owing to time and resource limitations it was not possible to conduct genuine impact evaluations. In practice the evaluation framework was developed in close consultation with the other RCF evaluations, especially that in Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to facilitate comparisons.

5. The present evaluation builds on and supplements the three outcome evaluations and attempts to take their findings, conclusions and recommendations to a higher level. This entails an added emphasis on assessing the added value of such a regional programme in an Asian context – vis-à-vis the global and country programmes UNDP – as well as an emphasis on determining the role of the programme in strategically positioning the UNDP within regional development priorities and UNDP corporate policy directions.

6. The evaluation team has attempted to validate findings from the outcome evaluations through triangulation (mainly interviews with UNDP staff and partners in the countries visited). More time, however, has been spent on collecting evaluative evidence concerning all the projects that were not covered by outcome evaluations. There have been three main sources for this: (a) project documents, progress reports and reviews; (b) knowledge products produced by the projects; and (c) interviews with UNDP staff in New York, the regional centres and country offices, as well as with partners such as governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional institutions, and other development actors.

7. Apart from New York, the evaluation team visited the two UNDP regional centres in Asia-Pacific, in Bangkok and Colombo, as well as the subregional Pacific centre in Suva, Fiji. Besides interviewing UNDP staff and collecting documentary evidence, a number of other actors were also interviewed in these places. Team members also visited Ulan Bator, Mongolia; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic; Manila, Philippines; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Suva, Fiji. The main interaction

here was with the UNDP country offices and with partners, regional institutions and other development actors. A few additional interviews were conducted in Malaysia. A total of around 200 persons were interviewed.

8. The general absence of systematic monitoring systems with baselines, benchmarks and indicators makes it difficult to assess outcomes. This was a problem for all the outcome evaluations, and even more so for assessing projects not covered by the evaluations. It is a clear limitation that only half of the projects were covered by the three outcome evaluations. Clearly the evaluation of the other half was much more superficial, given the limited time and resources for that evaluation.

9. In addition, there is the usual problem of attribution, which is particularly severe in relation to projects focusing on the creation of knowledge products and advocacy and policy advice based on them.

II Main findings

10. This chapter presents the evaluation findings. It is structured around the customary evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

A. Relevance

11. The overall thrust of the RCF is highly relevant and has provided a people-centred perspective for dealing with the challenges of the region in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, with the exception of its global work on human development, in the area of macroeconomic and trade policies UNDP faces a credibility issue, as there are several large multilateral organizations – including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the African Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific – that are already active in these areas. Those organizations have greater specialized intellectual and analytical capacity, and in some cases their policy advice is linked to flows of loans and grants. Moreover, they have traditional ties with the key institutions of government that are generally responsible for economic and trade policy.

12. Over the years UNDP has accumulated influence in the area of democratic governance, especially in new and politically sensitive areas such as corruption, human rights and capacity-building of parliaments. While governance is a mature UNDP practice, it continues to be very relevant in the Asia-Pacific region. With its comparative advantage, UNDP can continue to play an important role in fostering best practices at all levels, especially given the increasing importance of governance to achieving the MDGs. The regional governance initiatives have facilitated the way for future interventions by raising awareness on issues of gender mainstreaming, civic engagement, accountability and transparency, and how those issues promote good governance. In addition, the RCF is especially relevant since its unique position allows the programme to operate in areas that are sensitive at the country level, such as justice and human rights.

13. The RCF projects in the HIV/AIDS cluster have been relevant in the Asia-Pacific context, where there are more than eight million people infected with the HIV virus. The RCF projects have contributed to setting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the wider context of societal and human development processes, and to some extent focused on cross-border factors in the spread of the epidemic that had been neglected by other organizations.

14. While the RCF projects under the subregional cooperation cluster vary from issues on trade and economic cooperation over combating human trafficking to peacebuilding and disaster mitigation, they are all relevant in meeting the regionality criteria of the RCF. Furthermore, in view of the numerous conflicts in the region as well as the recurring natural disasters, the RCF is especially pertinent to addressing the current

challenges of the respective subregions as they confront the cross-cutting theme of crisis prevention.

15. Although there has been significant progress in the area of gender and development, gender inequalities continue to characterize the socioeconomic and cultural environment in the Asia-Pacific region. Recognizing that mainstreaming gender is essential to achieving the MDGs and human development, the inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting theme in the second RCF is very relevant. UNDP acknowledges that despite its commitment to mainstreaming gender across all practices, gender equality remains elusive. In fact, in each of the core practice areas, the effective inclusion of gender has yet to be institutionalized.

16. Generally, the second RCF has been relevant and has created strategic opportunities for future interventions by UNDP and other organizations to deal with regional development challenges and trends to work towards achieving the MDGs in the Asia/Pacific region.

B. Effectiveness

17. This section is based on a detailed presentation and assessment of all 30 projects and programmes under RCF II. They have been clustered into four thematic areas: (a) poverty cluster; (b) governance cluster; (c) HIV/AIDS cluster; and (d) subregional cooperation cluster.

Poverty cluster

18. Overall, the poverty cluster has been successful in producing an impressive number of products, notably analyses and reports that are mainly of good quality. Where the programme has been lacking is in follow-up to these studies through dissemination and advocacy, leading consequently to less-than-optimal use and policy impact. It can, however, be argued that the country-level follow-up goes beyond the limited capacity of regional programme and should be the primary responsibility of the country offices. For that reason, it is important to establish better links with the country programmes. Where those links have been inadequate, the reason has sometimes been lack of communication with and involvement of the country office in the regional programme. It would also be important to involve the governments systematically when RCF missions visit countries in order to generate 'buy-in'.

19. The benefits of the regional programme, including the workshops and training events under the RCF, have been recognized as putting the country into the regional context and for learning from others. On the other hand, in many cases the country offices have not had the resources to initiate follow-up, even when the regional programme has been highly relevant to their needs. It would be useful to consider establishing a regional facility under the RCF from which the country offices could draw for emerging topics.

20. The poverty cluster has been well managed with limited resources, which were further strained temporarily during the establishment of the regional centres. However, it is necessary to find an appropriate balance between undertaking regional programme work – including not only the production of knowledge products, but, importantly, the necessary follow-up to them – and policy advice and technical backstopping to the country offices. Also for this reason, a further consolidation of programme focus is necessary. For the credibility of its programme, UNDP must stay the course in its areas of expertise over a longer period of time.

Governance cluster

21. Democratic governance is one of the five UNDP core practice areas. Under the RCF, 11 projects fall under the governance cluster. Overall, the regional governance programmes have contributed to fostering democratic governance practices and

processes, especially in the newly emerging economies and the smaller Pacific Island Countries (PICs). The results of the programmes bear testimony to the value of the regional initiatives to elevate governance issues on the policy agenda of many of the countries.

22. While the effectiveness of the regional governance programmes has been attributed to the quality of the project staff and their ability to develop and establish cooperation with the country offices, there is concern about the weak linkages between regional and country programmes and that the regional initiatives do not adequately address country priorities. Some country office staff have limited knowledge of regional initiatives and seem to work independently even when similar programmes are offered. There is a need for closer coordination with country programmes and other donor initiatives at the country and subregional levels. The regional governance projects would benefit greatly from clearly defined partnership strategies with stakeholders and donor agencies to ensure impact through improved coordination of efforts in participating countries.

23. The outcome evaluation highlighted potential threats to effectiveness, including differing agendas of external actors; the sensitivity of some governments to certain human rights and governance themes; and the heterogeneous nature of the region. Some stakeholders believe that UNDP projects are reluctant to address highly sensitive human rights issues even though those issues have been identified as key development constraints in the region. While the regional governance programmes have reinforced learning and contributed to reforms, they are prone to lapses where there is insufficient political will and critical mass.

24. The regional governance programmes occupy a unique position as they can operate in areas such as justice and human rights that are sensitive at the country level. Furthermore, the initiatives have facilitated the way for future interventions by raising awareness of gender mainstreaming, civic engagement, accountability and transparency, and how those issues promote good governance.

HIV/AIDS cluster

25. As part of the theme 'democratic governance for human development', four projects focusing on HIV/AIDS have been implemented. The projects in the HIV/AIDS cluster have focused on cross-border factors in the spread of the epidemic neglected by many other organizations, and in this area the RCF has made a real difference. The regional programme has also proved its effectiveness in dealing with the sensitive issues linked to the epidemic. But the programme has not been sufficiently linked to country programmes. Even sensitive issues eventually have to be dealt with at the country level, and the link between the regional centre in Colombo and the country offices must be strengthened.

26. The effectiveness of completed projects has varied, and some project outcomes could not be sustained. All the projects were severely hampered by cutbacks in funding, although apparently there is some disagreement between the regional centre in Colombo and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific about the justification for this. Not all the activities under the three completed projects measure up to the regionality criteria. A clear division of labour should be found between the regional programme and the country programmes. The gender dimension of the epidemic is crucial and must be addressed much more consistently.

27. Another question is whether HIV/AIDS projects need to be part of a *regional* programme such as the Asia-Pacific RCF. Most of the efforts to combat HIV/AIDS unfold at the national and local levels and have become quite well entrenched in most Asian countries.

Subregional cooperation cluster

28. Seven projects have been clustered under this heading. The projects have in common that by and large they are truly regional – that is, they measure up to the regionality criteria which are important for the RCF. In other respects they are very different in their substance, modalities and objectives, and in terms of their effectiveness. The Tumen River and Silk Road projects have been under implementation for a long time but are both characterized by a huge gap between towering ambitions and meagre resources. In both cases it seems necessary for the governments involved to take ownership and contribute more actively to project implementation. Otherwise the results will continue to be of limited significance and a far cry from the potential. The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, in contrast, was been endowed and has succeeded in bringing several organizations together, and notably in bringing governments on board. The project has addressed sensitive issues and has been very effective in furthering an anti-trafficking agenda in the sub-region.

29. The 'PeacePac' project deals with highly relevant issues in the PICs but spreads its limited resources on so many different activities that it harms effectiveness. It is a problem that the project tries to span human crisis, natural disaster prevention, and risk reduction and mitigation. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) project forms part of a longstanding cooperation between UNDP and this important regional institution. To some extent it has focused on building much-needed capacity to narrow the gap between the new, very poor ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) and the others, but UNDP funding appears to have been supporting a range of other activities not all central to its mandate. Finally, the two tsunami projects form part of a response to an obvious need. The main issue here is whether those projects will succeed in building capacity in a way that is aligned and coordinated with all the other initiatives carried out by the numerous actors in the post-Tsunami arena.

C. Efficiency

30. With a total budget of $89,738,163 spread thinly over five years, the limited resources have posed challenges to the RCF. Efficiency is compromised when the programme tries to deliver too much in terms of thematic coverage to a large number of countries with its limited resources (the PeacePac initiative is an example). The limited resources have constrained the impact of many innovative programmes, which were unable to capitalize on regional initiatives, as in the case of the HIV/AIDS projects, the Regional Environmental Governance and other governance projects.

31. The problem of limited resources is aggravated by complex financial tracking systems that make it difficult to monitor the efficiency of programme delivery. The cumbersome and lengthy application, procurement and exit procedures have deterred some external stakeholders from engaging with UNDP because the disproportionate administrative and time costs required to access relatively small amounts of funds outweighed potential benefits.

32. The financial modality of the second RCF was to engage with numerous partners – such as governments, NGOs, donors and regional organizations – to ensure the cost effectiveness of the programmes. At the planning stage, it was envisaged that out of the $130 million estimated for the RCF, UNDP would provide $71 million while the balance (45 per cent) would be mobilized from other partners. In actuality, almost two-thirds of the funding of the second RCF came from UNDP target for resource assignment from the core funds. While the projects under the governance, HIV/AIDS and subregional cooperation clusters managed to secure almost half of their funding from other resources, in the case of the poverty cluster projects, total co-funding was only 13 per cent.

33. Prior to the establishment of the regional centres in 2004, the management and coordination of the governance programmes were decentralized, with UNOPS as the executing agency. There was criticism of how the RCF projects were being executed by

UNOPS until April 2006, when the execution function was shifted to the regional centres. Since UNOPS was involved almost exclusively with administrative support there were no backstopping staff that could interact substantively with the project personnel. Without sufficient understanding of the importance or substance of the projects, UNOPS support was inefficient and characterized by chronic delays. Although the efficiency of implementation had improved and was satisfactory overall, the cost of management was relatively high. In fact, the regional centres (and the SURF) accounted for 15 per cent of total RCF expenses.

34. Despite its relatively low budget, the second RCF for Asia-Pacific has managed to harness its resources to generate an impressively large number of studies that provide an alternative perspective and influence on national pro-poor policies within the region. These studies (such as the regional and subregional human development reports) have been produced in a relatively short period of time by a very limited number of professional project staff. The RCF was efficient in its use of electronic media to enhance networking with partners and stakeholders as well as to disseminate the knowledge products.

35. The establishment of the regional centres in Bangkok and Colombo consumed time and resources midway through RCF II. This created a good deal of turbulence and at short notice led to reductions in the budgets of a number of the projects. However, the centres have evolved remarkably well in relatively short time and have injected a new dynamism into the regional programme. From a narrow management perspective it might have been more efficient to create just one centre, but the two centres, located in the South and South-East Asian sub-regions respectively and with their thematic division of labour, appear to be an appropriate institutional setup, given the political considerations as well as the development challenges.

36. Prior to the establishment of the sub-regional centre in Suva, the Pacific subregion tended to be largely ignored in most regional programme interventions. The establishment of the Pacific centre in Suva in 2005 was certainly a step in the right direction and has managed to infuse the programme in the Pacific Islands with new energy.

D. Sustainability

37. Overall, the evaluation team considers the sustainability of the RCF outcomes and benefits to be varying. Stakeholders have stressed that the key to sustainability is to engage country offices to take a role in maintaining momentum and sustaining national-level initiatives. Otherwise, while the RCF may have produced innovative initiatives, many of these will dissipate at the end of the project. However, some country offices find it difficult to sustain the benefits from the RCF activities and policy changes when the initiatives do not rank high among national priorities. On the other hand, for RCF activities which are well linked (and relevant) to country programmes, the benefits have been sustained and integrated at the country level, as in the case of some activities of the Regional Energy Programme for Poverty Reduction and the Pacific Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, which have managed to replicate their pilot project using private funds.

38. In aggregate, the project outputs of the PIC-focused initiatives seem to have been more sustainable in that (a) they have been successfully integrated into country plans and initiatives and/or are being used as a basis for policy development; and (b) they have led to follow-on activities.

39. Generally, sustainability in all the thematic and cross-cutting initiatives requires the development of long-term, multi-faceted partnerships with all key institutions in the region and networking at all levels. However, with limited resources, there is a need for UNDP to make strategic choices in terms of target countries and thematic focus.

III. Conclusions

A. Relevance

40. By and large, the programme has succeeded in addressing critical problems of the Asian region and the Pacific subregion. This has happened at a time when many parts of Asia as well as the Pacific Islands have gone through dramatic changes in both the economic and the political sphere. The programme has been flexible enough to address the changing needs of various parts – and partners – of the region.

41. At the core of RCF II have been activities aimed at fostering sustainable human development and achieving the MDGs. However, its contribution to the goals has been largely indirect. The programme has primarily produced a vast range of knowledge products in these and associated areas. Most of the knowledge products have certainly been relevant, but their dissemination has not been given the required attention. The knowledge products have been used for training, capacity development and advocacy, much needed but highly insufficient owing to the limited resources of the programme.

42. Overall, there has been a lack of clarity in the structuring of the RCF. This militates against giving the programme a clear strategic thrust.

43. Despite these critical remarks, it is nonetheless clear that the main themes of RCF II – and the corresponding clusters of projects – have been relevant for the Asia-Pacific region. In spite of the remarkable economic dynamism and the success in poverty reduction in recent years, combating poverty remains the paramount development challenge. The regional human development reports and MDG reports, as well as a range of other knowledge products, have been relevant and useful as a basis for advocacy, capacity development and policy advice targeted at governments, regional institutions, NGOs and other development actors. If the human development perspective – and its relation to achieving the MDGs – is focused, sharpened and refined, UNDP can maintain and strengthen its comparative advantage in a way that is highly relevant to the development challenges of the Asia-Pacific region.

B. Effectiveness

44. Overall, it is likely that the RCF II has contributed to poverty reduction, human development and achievement of MDGs, but mainly indirectly. There have been a few downstream activities directly supporting poor beneficiaries, such as the microcredit programme under Pacific Sustainable Livelihoods Programme in the Pacific Islands. But the main thrust of the programme has been upstream, aiming at producing and disseminating knowledge, creating awareness, building capacity and influencing policy. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness, outcome and impact of such efforts. There are many actors and factors at play, and the link between advocacy based on UNDP knowledge products, changes in policies and/or practices and reduced poverty or enhanced human development is at best indirect and difficult to track down. Moreover, the RCF II has no framework for systematic monitoring with baselines and indicators, and hence the evaluation has entailed a fair degree of circumstantial evidence and partly subjective assessments, based mainly on documentary studies and interviews with a large number of stakeholders.

45. The programme has been effective in producing a vast number of knowledge products, generally of reasonably good quality. Quality might have been even better if the quantities produced under certain projects had been somewhat limited. The flagship products have been the regional human development reports and the MDG reports; these have been very useful and have contributed to raising the profile of the RCF. The

programme has also organized a large number of training sessions, workshops, seminars and conferences and used these to disseminate ideas, findings and policy advice.

46. Nevertheless, the dissemination, capacity-building, advocacy and policy advice activities have not been given enough attention. The financial and human resources of the programme have not been sufficient. Moreover, the link between the RCF and the UNDP country offices has been too weak. Ideally, the major part of the capacity-building and advocacy work could be carried out by the country offices that have good relations with governments and other development actors. But this happens only to a limited extent, and thus good opportunities for increased effectiveness and impact are lost.

47. The RCF has dealt successfully with a range of sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights and HIV/AIDS. There is no doubt that a regional programme has a comparative advantage in tackling such issues, although ultimately they have to be addressed at the national level.

48. The programme also focused on a number of cross-border problems, and promoted regional advocacy. However, a number of projects – and activities under them – do not really measure up to the regionality criteria and might as well have been implemented at the national level.

49. The gender dimension has remained a weakness in the second RCF in spite of attempts to strengthen it through, inter alia, the development of a gender strategy and the establishment of a gender steering committee. Mainstreaming gender in all parts of a future programme remains a huge challenge.

50. The effectiveness of RCF II has been hampered by spreading the limited resources over too many themes, practice areas, projects and service lines. The aim of the programme was to concentrate on 20-25 projects; it ended up with 30. Perhaps more seriously, under many projects a wide range of somewhat disjointed activities have been carried out with little internal coherence and lack of prioritization. The programme has in fact lacked a clear strategic focus, and the attempt to become more demand-driven and responsive has resulted in the implementation of a wide range of different activities without any clear direction – other than some affinity with RCF II themes. The aggregate result is that the programme has not sufficiently positioned UNDP as a strategic development actor building on its comparative advantages.

C. Efficiency

51. Against a projected RCF II budget of $130 million for the five year period 2002-2006, the budget that materialized was just under $90 million – a shortfall of more than 30 per cent. The shortfall in resources particularly affected the 'sustainable development' theme. The RCF II projects were also negatively affected by budget cuts necessitated by the costs of setting up the regional centres in Bangkok and Colombo and the subregional centre in Suva. The way this was implemented adversely affected a number of projects. In many cases the budget cuts came at short notice, which generated negative reactions among some partners and staff members. Some expressed the view that the credibility of UNDP was eroded. Nevertheless, it is the view of the evaluation team that it was the right decision to establish the regional centres. They have infused the programme with new dynamics and provided an appropriate infrastructure for future regional programmes. The technical support and backstopping they offer to UNDP country offices is greatly appreciated, and the centres – with their division of labour – are better placed to provide a decentralized, effective and efficient implementation structure.

52. The programme has been quite efficient in producing a vast number of knowledge products and other outputs with limited human and financial resources. Overall, the staff have been dedicated and hardworking. However, resources have been spread too thin, which has reduced not only effectiveness but also efficiency.

53. A significant weakness of the programme is the lack of an adequate monitoring and evaluation framework. That weakness is not just a problem for the RCF but is a general weakness in the work of UNDP. The results-based management framework introduced under RCF II is not in itself sufficient. The general lack of a systematic monitoring framework with baselines, benchmarks and indicators makes it difficult to assess the progress of the programme as well as individual projects, and results in evaluations that are based on somewhat shaky ground. This evaluation is no exception! An improved monitoring and evaluation framework could greatly enhance programme efficiency and effectiveness.

D. Sustainability

54. The wide range of activities under the many projects and service lines has militated against sustainability of the outcomes and benefits. So in terms of sustainability the outcome has been mixed. There have simply been too few resources, particularly human resources, to follow up on the many initiatives. Moreover, the focus on production of knowledge products has in itself undermined sustainability to some extent. The dissemination and capacity development parts of the programme that are vital to sustaining the benefits have not received enough attention.

55. The weak linkage between the regional programme and UNDP country offices has also limited sustainability. Ideally, the country offices could play an important role in following up, providing policy advice and building capacity, based on the regional knowledge products. But this has happened only to a limited extent. Finally, it is a problem that most of the projects under RCF II have been only 2-3 years in duration. Although this may be sufficient in some cases, there is a need to work on many projects and themes with a much longer time horizon. This will contribute to making the outcomes and benefits more sustainable.

IV Recommendations

56. The evaluation is timed to contribute to the formulation of the next regional programme in the Asia-Pacific region. The three outcome evaluations – on the poverty, governance and HIV-AIDS clusters of projects – include a large number of very specific and detailed recommendations. What follows here is a limited number of recommendations of a more general nature.

Recommendation 1. *The programme should concentrate on fewer objectives, themes, projects, service lines and intended outcomes.* This is a recurrent theme in the outcome evaluations, and it is a key to greater effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

Recommendation 2. *The new programme should have a clearer strategic thrust, informed by the UNDP human development concept and focused on the link between governance and poverty reduction and achievement of MDGs.* This will both contribute to greater effectiveness and raise the profile of UNDP in the region based on its comparative advantage. Including the MDGs in the strategic focus should not imply that the programme can deal with anything and everything that is included in the MDGs.

Recommendation 3. *Concentration and a clearer strategic focus must entail a reduction of themes/practice areas.* The environmental theme was curtailed in practice under RCF II and may be reconsidered in view of the capacity and competence of UNDP vis-à-vis other strong actors in this area. Similar considerations might concern the area of natural disaster risk reduction. It should also be considered whether there is a continued need for regional UNDP HIV/AIDS projects.

Recommendation 4. *If macro-economic and trade issues are kept in the programme, the relevant competences require strengthening.* The issues are clearly relevant for poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs, and the human development perspective is important. But UNDP faces an uphill struggle to become recognized as a qualified actor in a field dominated by actors with established credibility and large resources such as the World Bank, ADB and UNCTAD.

Recommendation 5. *The programme must strike the right balance between supply (strategic focus) and demand (the changing needs of region).* In the past – RCF I – the programme was primarily supply-driven. It has moved towards becoming more demand-driven, and this has enhanced its relevance and effectiveness. But there is also a risk of becoming too demand-driven and thus losing strategic focus.

Recommendation 6. *There must be a better balance in the programme between the basic production of knowledge products and – more – capacity development, advocacy and policy advice.* This will lead to better utilization of the many qualified outputs and hence greater effectiveness.

Recommendation 7. *The regional programme should be better linked to the country programmes.* The weak linkage between the regional programme and the country offices is a recurrent theme in the outcome evaluations. The relevance and effectiveness of the programme can be enhanced if the country offices get more involved in programme planning (through substantive consultation) as well as in using the knowledge products for capacity-building, advocacy and policy advice.

Recommendation 8. *The programme should concentrate on projects that measure up to the regionality criteria.* Having too many projects and activities that are not truly regional dilutes the programme and distorts its profile. It is important that the programme concentrate on issues and modalities that are regional in character.

Recommendation 9. *The gender dimension must be mainstreamed in the programme.* In spite of recent attempts to strengthen the gender dimension, it remains a weak point. In view of the crucial importance of the gender dimension for poverty reduction, human development and achieving the MDGs, mainstreaming should be accorded high priority. It will be necessary to strengthen the gender competence (more gender specialists) in all three regional centres.

Recommendation 10. *It is necessary to strengthen monitoring and evaluation.* The lack of an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework with baselines, benchmarks and indicators makes it difficult to monitor the progress of projects as well as the entire programme. An improved monitoring and reporting framework will also strengthen the foundation for reviews and evaluations. Thus it is both a management tool and an instrument for better documentation of results.

Recommendation 11. *The regional programme and the regional centres should catalyse closer cooperation with other United Nations organizations based on a clear division of labour.* Building on the United Nations aim of 'delivering as one', UNDP must find its new role in closer cooperation with other United Nations organizations. The regional programmes provide important opportunities for furthering this agenda.

Recommendation 12. *There is scope for closer collaboration with regional institutions, but it must be selective, focused and based on a clear division of labour.* The cooperation with ADB can be intensified. Support to ASEAN must be more selective and focused, based on UNDP priorities. The cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on the monitoring framework for the Pacific Plan may be considered exemplary.